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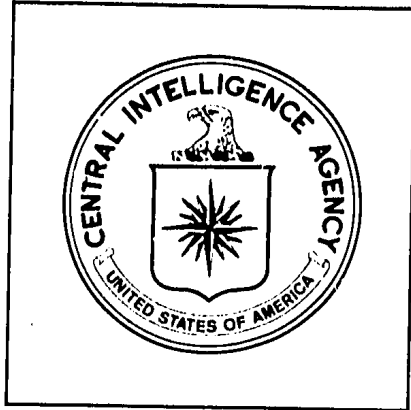
Middle East, Africa, South Asia

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MIDDLE EAST -- AFRICA -- SOUTH ASIA

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Middle East - Africa Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

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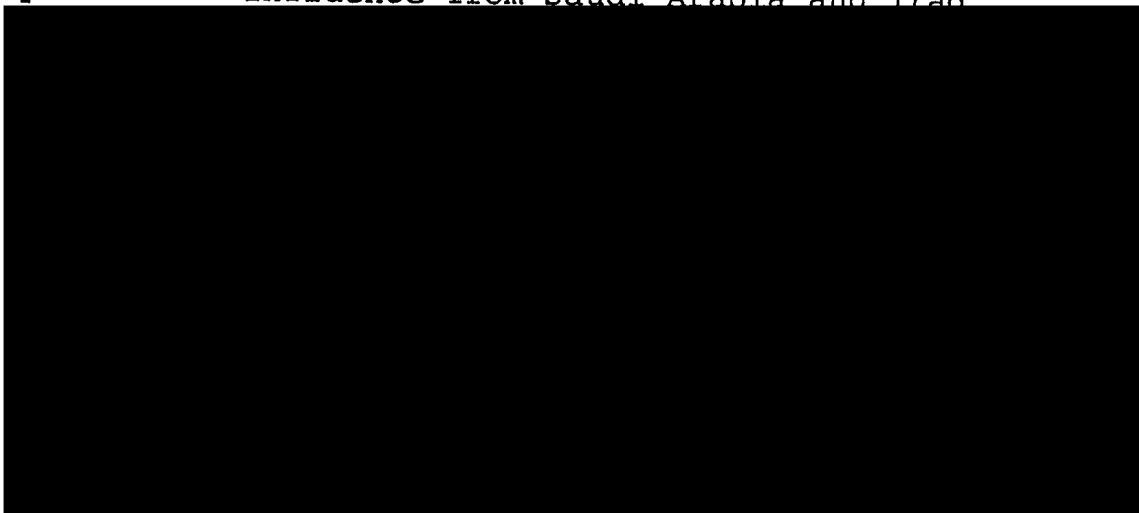
North Yemen

Assessment of New Cabinet

The US embassy in Sana has assessed in very favorable terms the new North Yemeni cabinet formed this week under Prime Minister Abd-al-Aziz Abd-al-Ghani. This is North Yemen's third cabinet in eleven months.

The embassy describes the cabinet as pragmatic, moderate, pro-Western, and likely to be less corrupt than the outgoing cabinet. Embassy officials have good personal relations with many of the new ministers. The several Baathist ministers in the ousted government were not reappointed. One of the key ministerial changes was the designation of Abdallah Asnag as foreign minister. Asnag, a major figure in the large Adeni exile community in North Yemen, was one of the leaders of the movement to oust the UK from Aden in 1967.

Following the swearing in of the al-Ghani cabinet, Sana's strongman Ibrahim Hamdi stressed in a well-publicized statement that the new cabinet was solely responsible to the Yemeni people. This was Hamdi's way of indicating that the cabinet was independent of influence from Saudi Arabia and Iraq.



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Malagasy Republic

Internal Rumblings

General Ramanantsoa, the head of government, dissolved the cabinet on January 26 and promised to form a new government. His move was an attempt to end a recent resurgence of tribal and military unrest highlighted by an unsuccessful coup attempt on January 1 by officers from disaffected coastal tribes. Ramanantsoa, who is still the most powerful figure in the government, apparently intends to give the coastal tribes a bigger role in the new government.

In his announcement dissolving the government, Ramanantsoa made no mention of the animosities that sparked the plotting and unrest; he claimed his move was prompted by the country's economic difficulties. The plotters resent the domination of the government by Merina tribesmen of central Madagascar. Until Ramanantsoa--a Merina--came to power in 1972 after student and labor demonstrations helped topple his predecessor, coastal people had long dominated the government.

Some of the coup plotters were arrested, but a coastal army officer who reportedly was to have headed a new regime, took refuge with a paramilitary police unit made up largely of troops from coast tribes. The police refused to surrender the officer and bargained with Ramanantsoa for a redress of coastal grievances. Ramanantsoa placed the armed forces on alert on January 23, but made no attempt to move against the police for fear of triggering serious ethnic strife.

Ramanantsoa's position does not appear to have been challenged by the recent events. Nonetheless, he has also tried by his cautious moves against the plotters to avoid aggravating similar differences among his key subordinates. Colonel Ratsimandrava, interior minister and head of the gendarmerie, and army Colonel Rabetafika, the director-general of

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the government and Ramanantsoa's right-hand man, have been rivals since Ramanantsoa came to power. Their conflict partly reflects traditional animosity between the gendarmerie and the army, an extension of coastal-Merina rivalry; the gendarmerie is predominantly coastal and the army is a Merina preserve. Ratsimandrava and Rabetafika may also have differed on how to deal with the current crisis, raising the possibility of a clash between the army and gendarmerie.

The faltering economy and food shortages have also contributed to the upsurge in unrest. The new cabinet promised by Ramanantsoa, therefore, may try to improve the situation and encourage more Western aid by diminishing government involvement in the economy and allowing an expanded role for private investment.

Regardless of any economic changes, Madagascar will probably continue to follow a foreign policy of radical nonalignment, which replaced the conservative, pro-French position favored by the pre-1972 government. Foreign Minister Ratsiraka, the driving force behind the current policy, is likely to retain his position. During his three years in office, Ratsiraka has won wide support among government colleagues and the people for his nonaligned policies, which include a ban on visits by foreign naval ships. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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Bangladesh

Mujib May Appoint a Central Committee

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[REDACTED] President Mujib plans to appoint a "central committee" as his next step in establishing an authoritarian government. The committee, which might replace the elected parliament, would consist of some 50 to 70 members from all segments of society, including the army. Committee members would serve at Mujib's pleasure.

The ability of parliament to oppose the government is already circumscribed by the legislation that shifted Bangladesh to a presidential system last week-end. That legislation gave Mujib a range of near-dictatorial powers. It authorized him to declare Bangladesh a one-party state, granted him extensive control over the judiciary, and institutionalized emergency regulations under which many basic civil rights had been suspended last month.

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The flurry of activity to change the political system may buy Mujib some additional time against any antigovernment move by the military. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] senior officers believe Mujib should be given a chance to try to use his new powers to improve conditions, even though they do not have much faith in his governing abilities. In any event, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the middle-grade officers who are spearheading coup plotting are not planning a move for at least another month. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM/NO DISSEM ABROAD/BACKGROUND USE ONLY/CONTROLLED DISSEM)

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